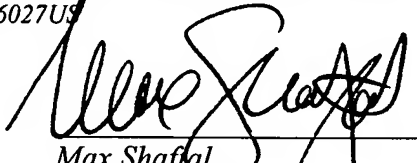


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Max Shafal
Registration No. 31,422

10 **BUNDLED CABLES AND METHOD OF MAKING THE SAME**

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

15 This invention relates in general to bundled cables and a method for making the same, and particularly, to bundled cables that maintain the cables in place during installation and use and which permit the cables to be easily removed by hand from the bundle for termination or connectorization.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

With the increased use of computers and other electronic devices being commonplace in buildings and other structures, the installation of cables (such as cables used to provide voice, data and video distribution throughout building such as houses, condominiums, apartment complexes, schools and the like) has become an important part
25 of both new construction and in renovating old buildings. Installation of electrical or other cables often involves feeding a number of cables through a length of ductwork or

other conduits. As there are often numerous cables that must be installed, it is accordingly advantageous to bundle cables together to permit a plurality of cables to travel through the conduits or ductwork of the building at the same time. As different cables will need to be connected at different points in the building and to different cables, devices, or systems, it is important that the cables be easily separable for termination or connectorization.

One known way to bundle cables is to surround a plurality of cables with an outer jacket. The cables may be separated within the jacket through a central spline or similar device. While use of an outer jacket to cover the cables may work in certain situations, several problems have arisen during their use. First, in order to separate the cables for termination or connectorization, it is necessary to peel off the outer jacket resulting in, among other things, increased labor costs. Further, the use of an outer jacket increases the overall size and weight of the bundled cables.

Another known way to bundle cables is to tie a plurality of cables together using a plastic strap or tie having a locking mechanism on one end. Once the cables are tied together, they may be pulled through the ductwork or conduit. However, during installation, the cables tend to separate or pull apart, making it more difficult to pull the cables through the conduit and leading to possible damage to the cables.

Another known way to bundle cables is to weld the cables to an extruded rigid central spline. An example of such a system is the HomeChoice® Banana Peel™ products manufactured and sold by Belden Wire & Cable Co. of Richmond, Indiana. However, it is often difficult to remove the individual cables from the central spline for termination or connectorization of the cables. Furthermore, the rigidity of the spline also

makes the overall bundle of cables rigid, thereby making it more difficult to bend or otherwise maneuver the bundle during installation. The spline is also susceptible to cracking when the bundled cables are bent at cold temperatures.

Therefore, there is a need to produce a bundled cable that is flexible, lightweight
5 and allows the cables to be easily removed for termination or connectorization, while being economical and easy to manufacture and install.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is an innovative improvement over the prior devices and
10 ways to bundle cables together in that the way that the cables are semi-permanently attached using a flexible strip or tape coated with a thermoplastic heat-sealable resin such that they may be easily removed by hand is an improvement over the prior art. In particular, the bundled cables and method of making bundled cables of the present invention includes a central flexible strip or adhesive tape having a heat-sealable resin
15 that may be heated and cooled to allow a plurality of cables to be removably attached to the tape.

In operation, the strip or tape is heated to a sufficient temperature to activate the heat-sealable resin. The cables are then wrapped around the strip. As the adhesive cools to room temperature, the cables become bound to the strip. The bond between the strip
20 and the cables is strong enough to maintain the cables in place during installation and use, while still permitting the cables to be easily removed by hand for termination or connectorization.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a new and improved system and method to bundle cables that allows cables to be held together during installation and use, but easily separated for termination or for use.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a system and method for
5 creating bundled cables that are flexible.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a system and method for creating bundled cables that are lightweight.

A yet further object of the present invention is to provide a system and method for providing bundled cables having a lower brittle point temperature.

10 Another object of the present invention is to provide bundled cables that allow for the instant identification of the individual cables.

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a system and method for providing bundled cables that are easy and economical to manufacture.

Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the
15 following detailed disclosure, taken in conjunction with the accompanying sheets of drawings, wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the bundled cables of the present invention showing four cables being removably connected to a flexible strip.

20 Fig. 2 is an exploded perspective view showing four cables and a flexible strip.

Fig. 3 is a perspective view of a flexible strip of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms, there is shown in the drawings and will herein be described in detail several specific embodiments, with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered
5 merely an exemplification of the principles of the invention and the application is limited only to the appended claims.

Referring now to the drawings, and particularly to FIGS. 1 through 2, there is shown a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The bundled cables of the present invention, generally designated by the numeral 10, comprises a plurality of cables
10 12, 14, 16, 18 and a central flexible strip or tape 20. While a bundled cable having four cables and one flexible strip is shown and disclosed, it is appreciated that any number of cables and flexible strips may be used and not depart from the scope of the present invention. It is also appreciated that a flexible central member other than a strip or tape may be used and not depart from the scope of the present invention.

15 The cables 12, 14, 16, 18 are preferably individually jacketed cables. In a preferred embodiment, two of the cables are Category 5e # 24 gauge, four pair cables with flame-retardant PVC jackets for voice and data communication, and two of the cables are RG-6/U cables with flame retardant PVC jackets for video and data services. However, it is appreciated that the cables may be of any of a variety of different cables
20 and not depart from the scope of the present invention.

The strip or tape 20 is preferably a flat 3/8 inch wide woven polyester tape, however, it is appreciated that a variety of different types and sizes of tape or other flexible strips may be used and not depart from the scope of the present invention.

Referring now to Fig. 3, the tape 20 is preferably coated in a known way with a heat-activated adhesive such as a thermoplastic heat-sealable resin 22. The heat-sealable resin is activated by heating the tape to or past the melting point of the heat-sealable resin by an inline heater or other heat source. Although a flexible tape having a heat-sealable resin coated thereon is shown and disclosed, it is appreciated that other heat-activated adhesives or other adhesives may be used, or one or more adhesive strips may be attached to the flexible strip, and not depart from the scope of the present invention.

In operation, the tape 20 with the adhesive 22 is heated to a temperature that is equal to or greater than the melting point of the heat-sealable resin (e.g., to approximately 270 degrees Fahrenheit). Each of the plurality of cables 12, 14, 16, 18 is then placed onto and, if desired, wrapped around the tape. In the preferred embodiment, one Category 5e cable and one RG-6/U cable are placed on each side of the flat tape. As the tape cools, the heat-sealable resin will bond to the plurality of cables. The bond created by the heat-sealable resin is strong enough to hold the cables together during normal installation procedures and during use, but allows the cables to be pulled apart by hand to permit the cables to be attached or terminated. In the preferred embodiment, the adhesive bond is not affected by cold temperatures and remains strong up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Bundling the cables according to the present invention also yields a bundle of cables that is less brittle at cold temperatures than conventional bonding systems.

Once the cables are bundled, the bundle of the present invention may be fed through a conduit or ductwork for installation. As the bundle does not require the use of an outer jacket, the bundle of the present invention will be smaller and easier to feed through the conduit or ductwork than conventional bundles. Furthermore, unlike the

prior bundling systems that use, among other things, an outer jacket or a rigid spline, the use of a substantially flexible strip of material or adhesive tape increases the ability (i.e., flexibility) of the bundle of cables to be bent or otherwise maneuvered during installation.

Once the bundle is pulled through the conduit or ductwork, one or more of the cables
5 may be removed from the bundle by pulling or otherwise separating the individual cables away from the bundle so as to overcome the bond of the heat-sealable resin.

It will be understood that modifications and variations may be effected without departing from the scope of the novel concepts of the present invention, but it is understood that this application is limited only by the scope of the appended claims.

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